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26 Die in Kentucky Mine Blast

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COLLECTIVE NOTES

We'd like to call your attention to an article and photographs on the Kentucky mine explosion which were sent to us by the *Mountain Eagle*, a weekly newspaper in Whitesburg, Kentucky. Due to a combination of weak governmental standards on mine health and safety, and a company-controlled union which has given the workers little protection, 26 people were killed in two explosions on March 9 and 11 at the Scotia Coal Company mine near Overton, Kentucky.

The *Mountain Eagle* is a progressive independent newspaper which has served Letcher County, Kentucky for nearly 69 years. It has long been supportive of miners' struggles. For information about subscribing, write to them at Tunnel Hill, Whitesburg, Letcher County, Kentucky 41858.

In addition to the photographs from Kentucky, we have included in our graphics section a page of original photographs of poor squatters in South Africa, which can be used with the story on page 5.

LNS

CORRECTIONS for the last packet, #773, March 17, 1976:

FIRE BREAKS OUT IN OREGON POWER PLANT story on page 7 -- in the seventh paragraph, the second sentence should read: "In the wake of the fire, however, the state's Energy Facility *Siting* Council..."

Likewise, in the same story, column two, the first full paragraph, line 8 should read: "...*Siting* Council unanimously voted..."

GAMMA RAYS TO REPLACE LETTUCE PICKERS story on page 8 -- in the second column, the first two paragraphs should be omitted as they are repeats.

[See graphics for photos to go with this story.]

26 KILLED IN TWO MINE EXPLOSIONS AT SAME MINE IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

WHITESBURG, Ky. (Mountain Eagle/LNS)--Fifteen miners were killed March 9 in an explosion at a Scotia Coal Company mine less than 24 hours after a federal mine inspector had cited the section of the mine where they were working for unsafe ventilation, methane, and dust control systems.

Two days later, eight more miners and three federal inspectors were also killed in a similar explosion in the same mine when they were investigating to see if the shaft should be reopened. The shaft has now been shut for a two to three month period.

The 26 deaths made the Scotia explosion the worst mine disaster in the history of Letcher County in eastern Kentucky, and the largest coal mine disaster in the state since 38 miners were killed in an explosion in Hyden, Kentucky in 1970.

Scotia is a subsidiary of Blue Diamond Coal Co. from Knoxville, Tennessee, a firm which produces about 3 million tons of coal a year. Company spokesman Ralph B. Smith, president of the firm, admitted that it "undoubtedly was a methane explosion" but maintained that "it was a freak coincidence."

But miners blame the inadequate air ventilation system in the mine.

Methane is a colorless, odorless, highly flammable gas which is often found in coal seams. To reduce the risk of explosion enough air must be circulated through the mines to prevent a methane build-up.

When methane builds to dangerous levels the slightest spark can cause an explosion. The first blast seemed to occur in an area where two miners were welding. The second explosion is thought to be caused by a spark from a compressor motor starting.

At seven o'clock the evening before the first explosion, an inspector for the federal Mine Enforcement Safety Administration (MESA) noted that the section of the mine in which the explosion occurred had only 25 of the required 36 water sprays necessary for a safe ventilation system. The MESA inspector issued a citation and directed that the violation be remedied the next day.

But at 11:30 a.m. on March 9 an explosion ripped through the southeast section of the mine, trapping 15 men underground. Nine of the miners apparently died instantly. The other six men put on air tanks and attempted to build an air-tight barricade against the poisonous gas. Their efforts failed and they suffocated when their air supply ran out.

The average age of the 15 killed in the original blast was 27 years.

The MESA office in Norton, Virginia also failed to report that its barometer showed a sharp drop in atmospheric pressure. Sudden drops in barometric pressure indicate greater amounts of methane gas and often precede mine explosions.

Ninety-three other miners had been working in other sections of the mine and escaped without injury. Most of the miners interviewed at the disaster site did not consider the mine safe. "When you hire onto Scotia, you know you're taking a risk," one said.

Another miner who has worked six years in the Scotia mine said that there has always been poor ventilation in the mine. "There's not enough air there," he said. "There has never been enough air there."

The miner, who wished to remain unidentified, said that he was working in the southeast section of the mine on March 8, when a "federal inspector" gave the company three notices for not having enough ventilation. They got ventilation up by yesterday (March 8) but they did it by shunting air from other sections over to the southeast. They do that every time an inspector comes in.

As one observer on the scene noted, "Just look at the ages of the dead men. Eleven of the 15 killed in the first explosion were in their 20's. The miners with more experience try their damndest to get into a safer mine."

"I'm not going back into that mine until they get an inspector in each of the five sections," another miner vowed. "That way they'll see just how much air is in there."

In addition to inadequate ventilation, one of the doctors on the scene suggested that if the miners had had proper safety training, at least six of them could have been saved. There is no compulsory safety training at the Scotia mine except the federally required first aid courses, which teach little except how to treat certain injuries.

Autopsy reports showed that the six miners who barricaded themselves after the explosion died when air in their tanks ran out. Had they not been afraid of the fire, which rescue workers say was not extensive, they could have used their 45 to 60 minutes' supply of air to walk to safety.

"Maybe this disaster, although it's a sad thing, maybe this had to happen before the federal people and the company will decide to institute some kind of mandatory safety training," said Frank J. Cecil, past president of the company-controlled Scotia Employees Association.

The Scotia Employees Association is one of many company-controlled unions in the coal fields of eastern Kentucky. Since the reform leadership of the United Mine Workers of America (UMW) was elected in 1972 they have stepped up efforts to organize the miners of eastern Kentucky into the 120,000 member union.

Two years ago miners in nearby Harlan, Kentucky waged a costly and at times bloody 10-month struggle to gain UMW representation.

After the Scotia explosion UMW organizer Tom Pyser reaffirmed the union's policy to "organize every major mine in Kentucky." He added that "I don't want anyone thinking that we are trying to capitalize on the deaths of the 26 miners here, and I won't say this can't happen in a UMW mine, because it could. But I do say we could provide the Scotia miners with better safety protection and job security."

He concluded by saying that the UMW is willing to talk with "anyone serious about talking about protection."

The current contract between the Scotia mine

and its Employees Association ends July 14 of this year. Under federal law, miners can begin petitioning for different union representation 60 days before the contract expires.

"Scotia and its parent corporation, Blue Diamond Coal, have been fighting the UMW for 15 years," said Bill Bishop, a reporter for the Whitesburg, Kentucky Mountain Eagle. "We'll just have to see if this disaster creates the momentum for a stronger union and stronger federal mine safety laws."

* * *

(Thanks to Helen Winternitz, Bill Bishop and other members of the Mountain Eagle staff for their work on this article.)

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MINE SAFETY IN OTHER COUNTRIES; ACCIDENTS CAN BE PREVENTED

NEW YORK (LNS)-- U.S. coal operators often boast that American coal mines produce five to ten times the amount of coal per miner than do mines in Europe and the Soviet Union. The price of this productivity, however, has been 100,000 deaths due to mine disasters in the U.S. since 1900 -- an accident rate among U.S. miners three times that of most European countries.

Ironically, in geological terms, U.S. coal mines are much safer than those in Europe. Most Appalachian coal seams lie only a few hundred feet below the surface compared to European seams which average 2000 to 4000 feet underground, leaving European mines more susceptible to cave-ins. Appalachian coal seams are usually five to six feet thick compared to European seams usually only three feet, with constant dips making maneuverability and roofing much more difficult in Europe.

For years, most European mines have used the "long-wall" method of mining, in which there is always a thick steel roof supported by hydraulic jacks over the work area. Only three percent of U.S. mines use this expensive method-- most of them simply shore the tunnels with wooden roofing and leave the area which is being mined, totally without roof supports.

U.S. miners have picked up a knack of listening for cracks in the wooden roofing, hoping for a few precious seconds to make a getaway. However with the use of a machine called the "continuous miner," it is impossible to detect the telltale rumblings, and much of the struggle of union miners concerns the right to turn off the machine at regular intervals to listen for the rumblings.

European mines also have a much higher content of explosive methane and poisonous carbon monoxide gases than do American mines. Unlike American mines, European mines are evacuated whenever the methane content reaches 1 percent. The miners are given pay, but do not return until the methane is pumped out. (It is stored for heating the homes of the mining community or to provide power to the mine.)

For years it has been known that nearly all methane explosions take place when the air pressure drops drastically. European coal mines are automatically evacuated whenever the barometer dips

rapidly, and European mines do not permit the use of the continuous miner, because its constant sparks can easily ignite a methane explosion. European mines, unlike American mines, also employ an "explosion barrier" to close off tunnels and prevent fires --a particularly dangerous occurrence-- from spreading to the whole mine.

Black lung disease, which affects virtually every veteran U.S. underground coal miner, is reported to be largely wiped out in Great Britain, the Soviet Union and China. This is done by regularly hosing down the walls and pumping large amounts of fresh air into the mines. Even if the American mines used this technique, however, the main problem lies with the continuous coal mining machine, which produces swirls of fine coal dust so thick that it is difficult for miners to even see.

According to one recent U.S. visitor to China who toured a coal mine there, the air in the coal mine was cleaner than above ground because so much filtered air was pumped in. In Kentucky, however, according to Robert K. Jones of the state's department of health, some miners in the state were breathing 76 times the amount of coal dust that could maximally be considered safe.

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(Most of this information came from "The Last Play," a useful book on the energy industry written by James Ridgeway in 1973.)

TAIWAN MILITARY CONTRACT AT MIT

NEW YORK (LNS)-- The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is currently training missile guidance experts for the government of Taiwan, the MIT student newsletter reports. Last spring it was disclosed that MIT had entered into a secret agreement to train nuclear engineers for the Shah of Iran.

Opposition to the projects by MIT students focuses on the repressive nature of the two governments, both strong allies of the U.S. They point in particular to the thousands of political prisoners in each country, the use of torture and military suppression of resistance to the regimes.

The 15 Taiwanese students enrolled in MIT's program in the Center for Advanced Engineering Studies are trained to engineer and manufacture the devices that keep a ballistic missile on course. These guidance systems are sophisticated enough to make an ICBM accurate to within one third of a mile of its target after being launched from up to 1500 miles away.

A February forum on the Taiwan contract for MIT students was attended by a man who took pictures of the Taiwanese students present, allegedly for his own "memories." He later admitted that he was an officer in the Taiwan Navy and was accompanied by a member of the Taiwan Nationalist Assembly.

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(Thanks to the Boston Real Paper for this information.)

IF YOU KNOW OF CAMPUS OR OTHER PROTESTS IN YOUR AREA, WRITE IT UP, SEND PHOTOGRAPHS, LET US KNOW, HERE AT 160 Claremont Avenue, New York, NY, 10027 or (212) 749-2200.

OKLAHOMA WOMEN ACTIVISTS TALK ABOUT CAMPAIGN AGAINST NUCLEAR ENERGY IN THE STATE

Editorial Note: The following two interviews with two activists from different parts of Oklahoma were conducted and transcribed by Betty Berman, a frequent INS contributor who lives in Norman, Oklahoma.

The proposed nuclear power plant referred to in the story, if built, will be the world's largest and most powerful with a capacity of 1,250 megawatts--far more than the current largest installation at Brown's Ferry, Alabama.

PLUTONIUM LEAKAGE AT CRESCENT. INTERVIEW WITH EILEEN YOUNGHEIN

Eileen Younghein lives in Oklahoma City and is leading the effort to close down the Kerr-McGee plutonium plant at Crescent, Oklahoma. The plant, which produces plutonium, was long kept a secret, gained notoriety in November, 1974 when a worker, Harold, a young union organizer and a worker at the plant, died on a bus on the auto corridor. The bus was finally found in December, 1974, in the Arizona desert. Harold, said Younghein, "was a member of the Board, and not like the other workers. He had a lot of interest in the plant."

"When I read they proposed building a nuclear reactor in India," wrote a letter to the Oklahoma Journal asking if they had considered the danger of plutonium. This was the last of September, 1973.

After I wrote the letter, two men came by who said they read the letter. They asked me did I know there was a plutonium plant at Crescent, 20 miles from Oklahoma City, operated by Kerr-McGee. We were completely shocked that there was one that close to the city.

The men said they were workers at the plant and that there had been a leak of plutonium nitrate. This is a plutonium nitrate--it is a waste--and it is outside the building. Each drum contains from two to five gallons of plutonium. It is supposed to be in a solid form--a type of plastic that makes it hard--but evidently there wasn't enough and some of the plutonium had eaten its way through the drum onto the ground.

You have to consider that one ten-millionth of an ounce of plutonium is known to cause bone cancer in beagles. If strays had been for 250,000 years, it is considered the most carcinogenic substance known.

The men said the wind or an infection or a bird could just pick some plutonium up and give someone lung cancer. This was the third or fourth leak they had there. It leaked on a truck bed and they just painted over it.

They also said that two men had been contaminated and before being decontaminated, left the plant and ate in a restaurant in Crescent. The company sent them a letter of reprimand but didn't go check on the restaurant.

I asked the men why they hadn't reported this to the AEC (Atomic Energy Commission--now the Nuclear Regulatory Commission). They said they were afraid of losing their jobs. They wouldn't tell me their names.

I talked to another worker at the plant who said he never heard of the word "leak" until he was on a picket line during a strike (Kerr-McGee) and someone told him it was a leak. He said it can give you cancer. The men who I saw were busy place knew plutonium was dangerous, but didn't think most workers at the plant were aware just how dangerous it was until two protesters from the University of Minnesota spoke to the union about the threat of the strike.

You have such a high incidence among the non-managers, people at the plant 60% every year. It would be hard to put a trace if somebody had gotten cancer at the plant. They'd get it somewhere else.

My husband and I visited the AEC. They sent three people to see if they wanted about three weeks to come. Those weeks I went to the plant and read up a lot on radiation and questions to ask them. When they did that was my question. I realized plutonium was easily absorbed by the body. When they came they said these workers were just mad at the company because they had been in about 100 years. There was a strike there at the plant a month before over safety and health and the union was strong.

They said they had read up on the Guthrie book. I said, "The Guthrie book is the basis for the plant. I kept the book. We looked at the records and that was what they had read. We read the inspectors' reports and found out that they were saying the workers had been told that the AEC had just voted to

close the plant. They were going up to the Guthrie book and saying they were going to the Kerr-McGee plant and doing research on plutonium. They turned out to be liars.

I talked to Dean McGee at a public meeting in February, 1974. He had managed to get a plutonium plant built in Oklahoma City without anybody knowing about it. He said "We were a little sneaky." That was the first time I had heard of it. I knew that there was a plutonium plant there although I was sure that the state officials knew.

After I found they had a plant there, I tried to get someone to write about it. You can imagine what a mess I had. Dean McGee was the one who I talked to and said the plant was doing fine. The Daily Oklahoman said what he was doing fine. I was with the union and Kerr-McGee threatened to sue the head-quarters out of Oklahoma City.

Legacy of Karen Silkwood

Wouldn't have had any of these accidents if Karen Silkwood hadn't been killed. Wouldn't have been here beating my head against the brick wall.

Karen was a laborer at the plutonium plant and a union organizer. I knew her personally. She was on her way to a meeting with a New York Times reporter in November, 1974, about the safety conditions at the plant when she was killed. She had with her a manila envelope full of material about the conditions.

After she was killed, a man from Kerr-McGee and a man from the AEC came and looked through Karen's car. The manila envelope had not been seen since then.

A month later, Kerr-McGee told the Energy Research and Development Agency that they would accept their responsibility unless the investigation of Karen Silkwood's

death and dropped if they were charged with something.

The art piece in Oklahoma City has been kind of funny. People don't want to believe it. Senator Bantlett asked the FBI to investigate the New York Times. So I sent the Times an item about the contributions Bantlett had gotten from Kerr-McGee.

Both U.S. Senators, Dewey Bantlett and Henry Bellmon are close to Kerr-McGee. Bellmon is pushing the nuclear park at Muskogee (the Inola plant). He and Dean McGee and John Lewis Stone, the publisher of the Muskogee Phoenix, all went to Washington to try to get the nuclear park OK'ed. One of Bellmon's aides was in with the AEC.

A man from Kerr-McGee told me, "If you're so afraid of protesting, why don't you just move?" I told him, "I've been here for 20 years, long before protesting started."

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KERR-McGEE INFLUENCE IN OKLAHOMA

For decades, the state of Oklahoma has been controlled by oil interests and its legislators bought with oil money. Perhaps nothing speaks more eloquently than a well pumping out of the city's main park, just one block away from the state capitol.

In recent years, however, the state's oil reserves have become almost depleted and Oklahoma ranks only sixth in national oil production. One oil company, however, with the aid of state politicians, has managed to do better than ever. It is Kerr-McGee.

Established in 1932 by Robert Kerr, a former U.S. Senator from Oklahoma, the oil company quickly diversified into coal production and in 1974 ranked as the nation's 81st largest producer.

As Kerr's partner, Dean A. McGee was buying up 178,000 acres of western steel. Senator Kerr passed through Congress a bill establishing the \$1.2 billion Arkansas Barge Canal which enabled coal to be shipped cheaply from Tulsa to the steel plants on the Mississippi River. Not far from the canal's terminus, Kerr-McGee operates one of the largest underground coal mines in the world--the Choctaw mine--with an annual capacity of one million tons.

But Kerr-McGee is most important now for its control of the uranium market. With control or option on a fourth of the country's supply of uranium through leases on 15 million acres of land and as the country's largest uranium producer, it is in uranium that Kerr-McGee's growth potential lies. More importantly, Kerr-McGee is the only company to integrate all the processes of the uranium industry--from mining and enriching to manufacturing fuel rods. This has given the company a virtual black check to fix the price of uranium, which has spiraled in price far faster than oil in recent years.

Members of the board of directors of Kerr-McGee sit on the board of virtually every Oklahoma City institution, including most of the banks, utility companies and the state university. Because thousands of people in the state are employed by the company and because of the propaganda that Kerr-McGee brings money into the state, organizing

against the company poses many difficulties.

The Inola nuclear park which the activists interviewed referred to will not be under Kerr-McGee's direct control. The Tulsa Public Service Company will operate the plant, but Kerr-McGee already operates a large uranium enrichment plant around which the Inola nuclear park will be built. Kerr-McGee sales to the project, planned as the largest in the U.S., will be tremendous.

PETITIONING AGAINST THE INOLA REACTOR: INTERVIEW WITH CARRIE DICKENSON

Carrie Dickinson and her husband run a nursing home in Claremore, located only 12 miles from the proposed Inola reactor. A farmer who sells produce from his farm to her nursing home says "Carrie has the only old folk's place I've ever seen where the old folks are happy."

Kim, a director of Citizens Action for Safe Energy, started it because of this nuclear plant the Public Service Company is planning at Inola. The plant will be 1,250 megawatts--the largest they've ever built. But it's not going to be, I say, it's be over my dead body.

I just decided to find out what the implications were. Oh, I read both sides of the subject, but the more I read, the more I became concerned. There are some scientists who have come to the conclusion that there is more leukemia and birth defects around nuclear power plants. The government doesn't accept their findings but sooner or later they're going to have to.

I told my husband other people ought to know what I found out. My husband said, "You can't get into a nuclear fight." I said to him, "If my grandchild gets leukemia from a nuclear power plant then I feel my life wasn't worth very much. I've lived a good life for almost 60 years." So he took a different viewpoint then.

She is wearing a long, pink sleeveless blouse with a bright yellow sun pointed on it. Underneath the sun is written "Switch to solar energy." Below the sun is a windmill and the words "Wind Energy," and by the windmill are a cow and a pig and a rooster and the words "Barnyard Energy (methane)." She made the blouse herself and is having more of them silk-screened to sell to raise money for the organization.

We have almost 6,000 signatures on a petition for a moratorium on nuclear power in the state. We're showing a film called "Energy Resources" whenever we can get the opportunity. The film says we can have solar and wind energy, etc.

The people in Claremore, a great many of them are very concerned. I guess we have about 600 signatures in Claremore. We have about 3000 from Tulsa (about 25 miles away) and the rest from all corners of the state.

A lot of people tell me, "I hope you freeze in the dark." A legislator from eastern Oklahoma called me a long-haired, wild-eyed environmentalist.

A number of people in Inola are concerned, but are afraid of the neighbors' attitude. They don't want to be thought of as different. The

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 8]

(See photos of the South African squatter camps in the graphics section of this packet to go with the following story.)

SOUTH AFRICAN APARTHEID POLITY FORCES THOUSANDS INTO SQUATTER CAMPS

Editor's note: The following article and accompanying photographs of squatter camps in the Crossroads and Muldenberg areas of Cape Town, South Africa first appeared in the March, 1976 issue of Southern Africa, a monthly news and feature magazine put out by the Southern Africa Committee in New York City. The article was edited by LMS.

NEW YORK (Southern Africa/NA) -- Whether "evicted out" of traditionally occupied urban areas now designated "white" by white South African planners, or "erased" from "black spots" in predominantly white rural areas, thousands of African and coloured squatters in South Africa must live on the fringes of human existence, both literally and figuratively.

Their housing consists of stacks of cardboard and tin, sackings and bits of wood. Malnutrition, violent crime, disease, constant uncertainty and insecurity are the rule in squatter camps. Tap water, toilets, schools, shops, medical care and adequate shelter are not.

In the Cape Peninsula alone, official figures put the number of squatters living at places like Vrygrond, Crossroads, Werkgeroed, Victoria Park and Lourdes Farm at 200,000. And the actual number may be twice as great, since that figure is only an estimate of Coloured or "mixed race" squatters and does not include the ever-increasing African squatter population at all.

Squatting has been a forced phenomenon of African life in South Africa since the first white settlers dispossessed the African population in the 17th century. Today, squatter settlements are the miserable product of apartheid's political, economic and social requirements, all of which are based on the maintenance of white supremacy.

Since 1959, the South African government has forcibly removed over 2 million Africans from their homes in order to implement its apartheid policies. Most of these people have been thrown into "re-settlement camps" in the desperately overcrowded Bantustans or "homelands," where Africans are theoretically supposed to be at home and govern themselves.

But there is no work in the Bantustans and not enough land to grow food for survival. So people must escape to survive. Seeking work, they go to townships, but there they are "illegal" immigrants and there is no legal place to live. As a result, they become squatters.

Bantustan residents and squatters are a crucial part of white South Africa's strategy for migrant labor manipulation and racial separation.

"We have labor peace and stability amongst the Bantu who are performing essential work in our white areas," explained the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration and Education in 1969.

"We are also affording our industrialists that stability in order to enable them to use Bantu labor for the performance of essential work

Things are going well in the Republic of South Africa in respect of the Bantu in our white areas. But at the same time we say that those Bantu in our white areas who are not economically active and are not engaged in the performance of normal or good work, should be channeled back to their own homelands."

Harassment of the squatters is constant. In Vrygrond near Cape Town, for instance, an estimate 500 families are consistently threatened that if they do not break down their shanties and move further into the bush, bull-dozers will be sent to do the job for them.

Reports of resistance are hard to come by as it is not the sort of news the South African government wants to make public, but Vrygrond residents, many of whom have been forced to move as much as three and four times in one year, banded together into a "We Will Not Move Again" campaign in the summer of 1975.

A spokesperson for the City Engineers Department, which is ostensibly responsible for the squatter camp, said that the people could not be forced to move further into the bush, but "that we would like them to." Nevertheless, other methods of displacement are used, like cutting the water supply to a particular area or removing the toilets. Still the people refuse to move.

At Lourdes Farm, a squatter who had moved there was told to remove his shack after one week to another part of the Farm. "We're not going to move," he said angrily. "We'll fight the inspectors if they come to pull down my house."

But it is difficult to organize resistance. Explained Pang, who has lived at Lotus Farm for four years:

"You can't go to the council (the puppet government set up by white South Africans to control the camps) and say you come from Lotus Farm and the people there want this or that. The council knows what the people want. If you go there they'll say you're a rebel and you cause trouble -- then you'll never get a council house."

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(You can subscribe to Southern Africa magazine by writing to them at 244 W. 27th St., Fifth Floor, New York, N.Y. 10001. A year's subscription is \$6 for individuals and \$18 for institutions. Bookstores can order in bulk at 60% plus postage. A single issue costs 75¢.)

"A TREMENDOUS ACHIEVEMENT..."

"Approximately 900,000 Bantu have been settled elsewhere under the National Party regime over the past few years, since 1959. Surely this is no mean achievement; on the contrary, it is a tremendous achievement. Over the same period at least 216,000 have been resettled under the National Party regime in terms of the Group Areas Act in Johannesburg alone. Approximately 75,000 have been removed from the so-called black spots..."

--South African Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration & Education Dr. P.G.J. Koornhof, speaking in the House of Assembly Debates in February, 1969.

[See graphics]

HOSPITAL ORGANIZING INCREASES ACROSS THE COUNTRY DESPITE MANY PROBLEMS

Editor's note: The following article originally appeared in the March issue of "Liberation & Sense," a monthly magazine published by members of the Black Liberation Front. Blacklists in California, MA, and elsewhere by INS.

NEW YORK (D&S:JNS) -- "It's like entering a combat zone each day -- a steady stream of sick patients and even fewer people to take care of them," commented one angry nurse who sees an early 80 patients per shift.

Her frustration is shared by an increasing number of the nation's nearly three million hospital workers. Both public and private hospitals are understaffing in the name of cost-consciousness, as more money is devoted to expansion, specialization and expensive technology and as more government funds are cut back. Patients are "pioneering" a potential increase in the organization of the work and the health care system, the more dedicated workers bring good patient care.

Although the rate of unionizing has been relatively high in the past two years [see box], only 15% of hospital workers are unionized. Organizing efforts are hindered not only by the anti-union campaigns of hospital administrators, but by the very structure of the hospital workforce.

Hospital Hierarchy

Walk into any hospital and you see -- besides doctors and administrators -- clerks, technicians, nurses and nurses aides, orderlies, maintenance, kitchen and laundry workers. They all wear different uniforms, are often divided in their jobs according to race and sex, have different amounts of training and receive vastly different rates of pay.

Nursing care, for instance, is provided by aides, licensed practical nurses (LPN's), and registered nurses (RN's). Although they do much of the same work, an aide can't become a nurse without quitting and going to school full-time. The LPN, with a year or two of school already, must go through two more years to become an RN. And RN's increasingly are ranked according to whether or not they have four or five year bachelor's degrees. The same distinctions are growing among lab and testing technicians as well.

"Any nurse can tell any aide or housekeeping worker what to do, no matter who's been there longer," reports one hospital worker. "Aides take care of dietary and housekeeping workers; they take care of each other. And since the only way to protect yourself from overwork is to refuse to do what's not 'your job,' eventually it gets taken out on the patient."

Differences in rank often mirror race and sex divisions in the society outside. Right below the administrators are the doctors, who are 98% white and 90.7% male. And beneath them, over 85% of the non-supervisory workforce is women performing the traditional "female" roles of caring, cleaning and

cooking. The remaining 15% is mostly black men. Only 9% of RN's and technicians are black, while 30% of LPN's and service workers are black.

Divide and Rule

Exploiting these divisions has always been a strategy of hospital administrators. In 1972, for example, RN's earned an average of \$182 a week, LPN's \$136, and nurses aides \$108. Doctors, incidentally, averaged \$800-900 a week.

This hierarchy also frustrates workers' efforts to improve conditions and patient care. In June, 1974, for instance, 4,400 RN's represented by the state Nursing Association struck 41 California hospitals for the right to sit on committees making decisions about the number and assignment of nurses.

California hospitals are among the most highly unionized in the country. However, in their strike the nurses refused offers of sympathy strikes by X-ray technicians and made no effort to enlist the support of unionized LPN's and aides for fear of having to support the strikes in return. The hospitals then temporarily forgot about their rules of "professionalism" and used LPN's and aides to cover for the striking RN's. The strike ended with wage gains but no increase in nurses' control.

Administrators also use these divisions to prevent unionization. Said one New Jersey health official, "It becomes increasingly important for management to show that various categories of employees do not have a community of interest. In fact, creating divisions between the categories at the time of the union election period will be beneficial. For example, LPN's vs. RN's, aides vs. kitchen aides, maintenance vs. laundry."

Growth of Unions

Until August 1974, workers in "non-profit" hospitals were excluded from federal labor laws protecting the right to organize. Union drives had to be conducted under often inadequate state laws or no laws at all.

In the 1950's and 60's, strikes by New York City hospital workers organized by Local 1199 of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Workers forced passage of a state law which led to collective bargaining agreements covering 60% of the workers in the city's private non-profit hospitals.

The success of Local 1199 in organizing predominantly black hospital workers in New York and later in Charleston, South Carolina, rested on both civil rights and labor appeals. By the end of Charleston's 13-day strike, more than a thousand people had gone to jail to support 500 black workers, 480 of whom were women.

"It helped me to realize how important I am as a person. I further realized that the power structure isn't all powerful," wrote an obstetric technician about the spirit of the Charleston strike.

Following upon these successes, the percentage of hospital workers covered by collective bargaining agreements has risen from 8.4% in 1970 to today's 15%.

Local 1199, now a New York-based national union, has 100,000 members in hospitals and other

health facilities. In addition, 200,000 health workers are members of the Service Employees' International Union (SEIU), and another 200,000 belong to the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME). RN's, who are rarely in any of these unions, increasingly bargain through state nursing associations, whose militance vary greatly from state to state.

CURRENT RATE OF HOSPITAL ORGANIZING

From the passage of the federal law protecting hospital workers in August, 1974 until April, 1975, 1,386 union elections in health facilities were scheduled, but only 423 were held.

Of the 200 of these that were held in hospitals, unions won 125, or 62.5% as compared to an average union victory rate of 50% for all industries.

However, in those cases where hospitals hired professional anti-union consultants to direct their campaigns, unions won only 33%, according to American Hospital Association reports.

From December, 1973 to December, 1975, the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees (Local 1199) won 182 elections covering 15,000 health workers and lost 91 elections covering 16,000. In 1974 and 1975 the Service Employees International Union won 366 elections covering 31,000 health workers and lost 262 covering 29,500 workers.

In sixteen years in New York City, Local 1199 has raised the minimum weekly salary for any worker in an 1199 unionized hospital from \$38 to \$171 with fully paid health and dental insurance. And the large number of black and Third World men and women in 1199 have given that union a relatively good reputation for fighting race and sex discrimination.

Union Limitations

Despite these successes, the hospital unions have stopped short of challenging the pattern of hierarchical organization itself. Some New York municipal hospitals, for example, have separate contracts by job category, with thirty to forty locals.

A recent, "successful" SEIU drive in Kansas City General Hospital covered only 200 out of the 1000 workers. Local 1199 uses three different sets of contracts -- one for service and maintenance workers, one for LPN's and technicians, and one for pharmaceutical workers.

Likewise, the national unions have not taken on issues of staffing and patient care. This leaves them in a poor position to protect members' working conditions or to counter management claims that wage gains must be passed on in the form of higher costs or reduced services for patients.

Local Initiatives

There are, however, some local initiatives in a different direction.

SEIU Local 715 in San Jose, California, is an independent local affiliated with the SEIU. It was formed when its members ousted the old leadership of what had been a conservative county employees'

association.

All county hospital workers, from janitors to RN's are members of local 715. It has a standing committee of stewards which represents all categories of workers and which makes recommendations about patient care. The committee's newsletter has earned a reputation for telling more about what goes on in the hospital than the administrators know.

In other cities as well, rank and file health workers in individual hospitals have formed organizing committees within their unions. These groups attempt to work across job title boundaries to deal with such issues as training opportunities, staffing, status of non-professional workers, and the forming of community alliances.

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TAKE IT TO THE BOSS IN PRAYER

NEW YORK (LNS)--Workers at an Erie, Pennsylvania hospital construction site successfully protested unsafe working conditions with 15 minute "prayer breaks" every hour. The ironworkers' local adopted this strategy, according to the Wall Street Journal, to circumvent laws that limit hospital site picketing and ban individual construction unions from striking to close down an entire building site.

A number of serious injuries had occurred on the job, so workers stopped work for 15 minutes every hour and prayed "to thank the good Lord that they had got through the hour without a serious accident" and to ask that the next hour be safe.

The contractors agreed to a settlement the next day.

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THE AD INDUSTRY'S GOT A GREAT IDEA. . .

NEW YORK (LNS)--The advertising industry has discovered "wasted space" on the backs of single-serving packets of sugar, and a company has arranged to sell ads on them. According to Advertising Age, the company believes the ads will be especially effective because "they reach people between the hours of nine and five when they have little contact with competing media."

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PROFITS IN NEW JERSEY

"Profit from the highest worker productivity rate in any industrialized state in America! Value added per dollar of wages is a hefty \$3.76 vs. the national average of \$3.36. That's the only measure of labor costs that matters."

--advertisement placed by the State of New Jersey in the New York Times, January 4, 1976.

GROUPS DEMAND REOPENING OF 1973
CALIFORNIA POLICE SHOOTING CASE

NEW YORK (LNS)--Amid new reports of misconduct in the Emeryville, California police department, Bay Area community organizations are again demanding the investigation into the 1973 fatal police shooting of Tyrone Guyton, a black youth be reopened.

An early March demonstration at the Alameda County Courthouse protested police repression in the black community and the District Attorney's failure to take any action against the police officers implicated in these incidents.

In November, 1973, fourteen year old Tyrone Guyton was shot to death by three undercover police officers from the Narcotics Squad of the Emeryville Police Department. The officers claimed that Guyton was involved in a high speed chase in a stolen car and that when they challenged him, he produced a gun and fired at them.

Eyewitnesses dispute these accounts and post-mortem and ballistics tests show that Guyton did not fire a weapon. No weapon was found at the scene. Moreover, it has been learned that the shot that killed Guyton was fired at close range while he was lying face down on the ground, after being felled by a first shot from the rear.

Three grand juries -- two county and one federal -- have investigated the case and all have returned verdicts of justifiable homicide. Consequently, none of the police involved have been indicted.

One of the three policemen, Dale Phillips, admitted that he committed perjury and falsified evidence in a drug case late last year. He was dismissed from the Emeryville police department and his misconduct prompted an investigation of the department by the District Attorney's office. This investigation disclosed, among other things, that all arrest records for the year 1973 -- when Tyrone Guyton was killed -- were illegally destroyed.

It was also revealed recently that Delores Wysingle, a police informer who testified in behalf of the police at the grand juries, was arrested by Phillips three months before the murder of Guyton. She was never charged and it is suggested that she owed Phillips a favor.

At the grand jury hearings, Wysingle, who has used 15 different aliases, said she knew Guyton and testified against his character. She produced a fifteen year old witness who claimed to have witnessed the shooting and to have seen Guyton with a gun. The girl later recanted this testimony, saying she was pressured into giving false testimony by Wysingle. Wysingle and Phillips have recently been implicated in other perjury cases.

District Attorney Lowell Jensen has refused to open the case or make public the evidence admitted so far. The Committee for Justice for Tyrone Guyton says it will continue to seek the reopening of the case and to fight police repression in the Bay Area's black communities.

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(Thanks to the Berkeley Barb for this information.)

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR 100,000 MICHIGAN WORKERS
EXHAUSTED; DETROIT UNEMPLOYMENT PUT AT 33 PER CENT

NEW YORK (LNS)--About 100,000 unemployed people in Michigan have exhausted their unemployment benefits in the last several months, and the Michigan Employment Security Commission (MESC) director Martin Taylor predicts that 120,000 more unemployed people in the state will lose their benefits before the year is out. The MESC, which handles unemployment insurance for the state, is also reported to be on the verge of bankruptcy.

Most of the 100,000 exhausted benefits are of auto workers laid off in late 1974, who were never rehired during the "economic recovery." The additional 120,000 benefits due to expire represent subsequent layoffs in other industries in early 1975.

According to MESC director Taylor, there has been an exodus of workers from the state in search of jobs and a dramatic increase in the number of people applying for welfare in the last year.

Federal statistics grossly underestimate the depth of Detroit's unemployment, which is as bad as during the Great Depression, according to recent study by Michigan State University. Government statistics place Detroit unemployment at 23 per cent, while the actual figure is 33 per cent, with 60 per cent of black workers unemployed.

Anyone working as few as four hours a week are counted as "employed," according to federal statistics which also leave out youths in Detroit, mostly black, who are of working age but who have never been able to find jobs, the report states.

"We don't have any recession, any recovery, we just have a super-depression, and it's getting worse," Detroit Mayor Coleman Young said of the local economic situation.

And state representative Raymond Hood said, "We estimate that less than 10 per cent of Michigan's senior citizens in need of food assistance are getting it. There are also an estimated 105,000 mothers and children in Detroit who require nutritional support but not getting it," Hood added.

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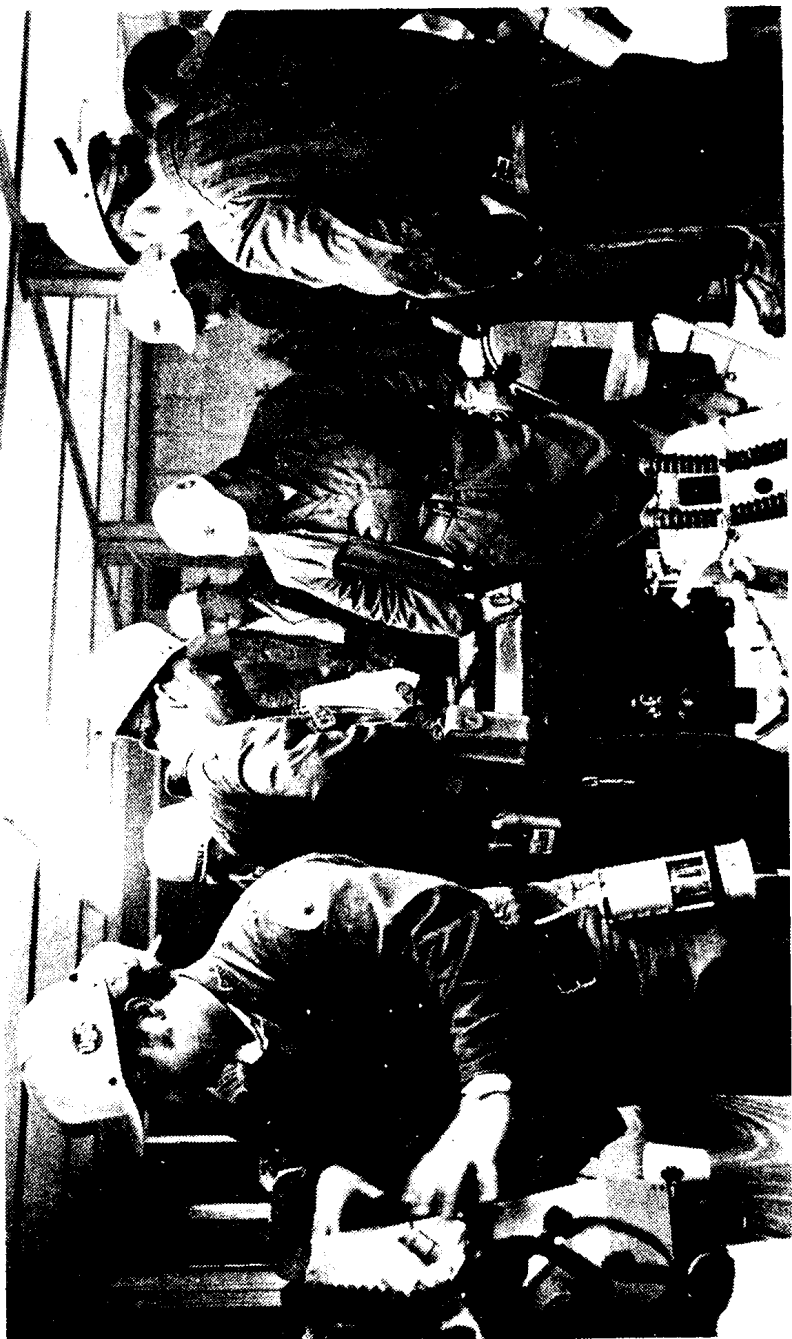
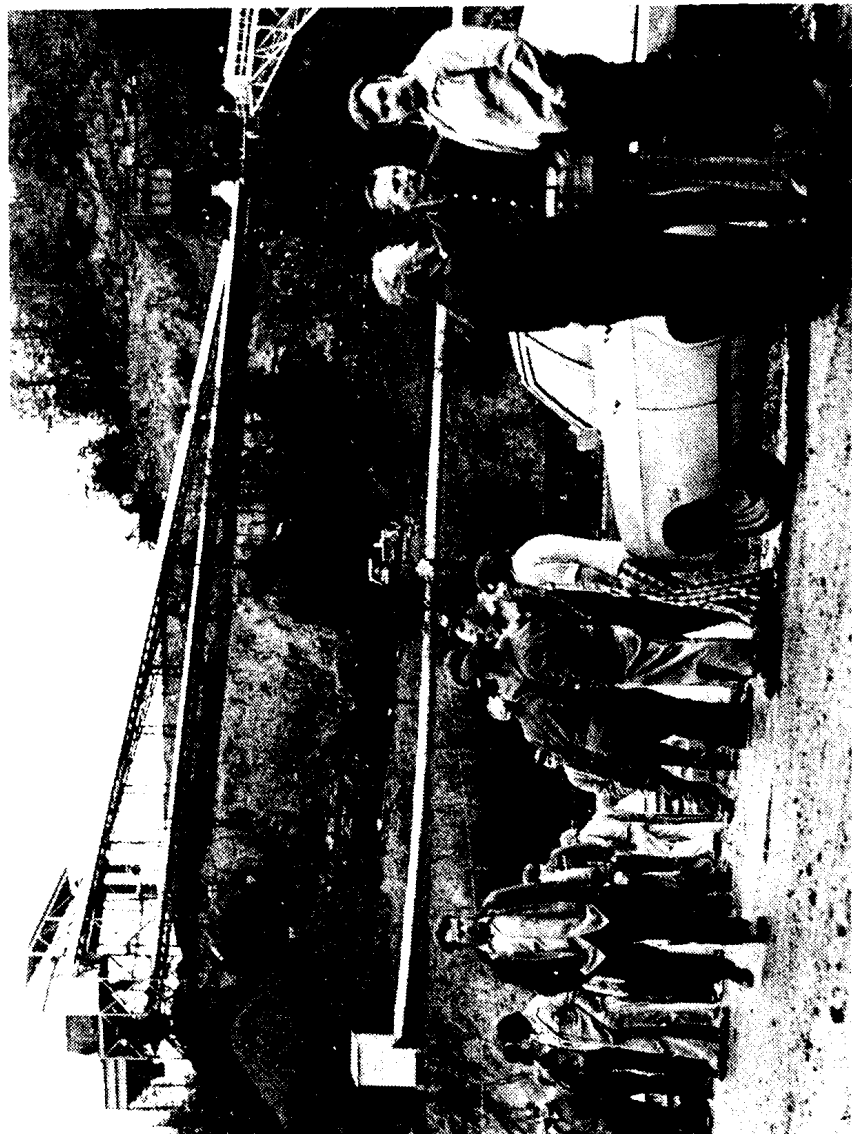
(Thanks to the Daily World for this information.)

TO ALL LNS SUBSCRIBERS:

April bills will be on their way in a week or two. So those of you who haven't paid your March bill yet please do it now.

KERR-McGEE--CONT. FROM PAGE 4:
city fathers decided this was a good thing and to go along with it. We have tried to get them to allow outside speakers to come to Inola, but the school board won't allow them to use the school auditorium for a meeting. They don't want to know. They've made up their minds to accept it and it's a sad thing. They're thinking about jobs. And they're thinking that the tax money from the nuclear plant would enable them to build the best school system in the whole state. That's what the Public Service company has been telling them.

The Public Service Company says there's no other way other than nuclear power. They say it's the cleanest, the safest, the cheapest. But it's none of them. And we're going to stop them." -30-



The real cost of coal

TOP RIGHT: All through a drizzly, chilly afternoon friends and relatives of miners wait to learn if anyone survived an explosion March 9, 1976, in the coal mines of Letcher County, Kentucky.

GOES WITH STORY ON PAGE ONE.

CREDIT: Helen Winternitz/MOUNTAIN EAGLE/LNS

TOP LEFT: Members of a U.S. Steel rescue team dress to enter the Scotia mine to save miners trapped by a methane gas explosion.

SEE PAGE ONE.

CREDIT: Helen Winternitz/MOUNTAIN EAGLE/LNS

BOTTOM RIGHT: Friends and relatives await word on those trapped in the coal mine explosion March 9, 1976.

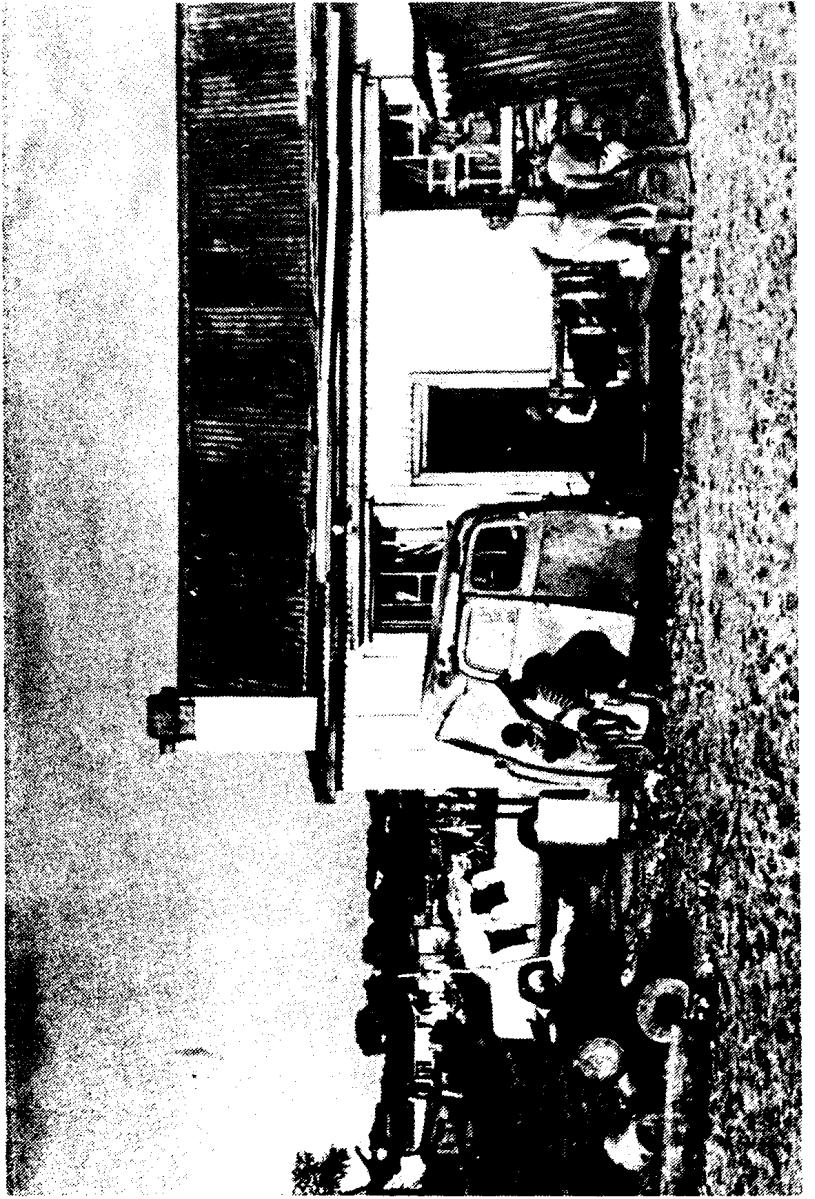
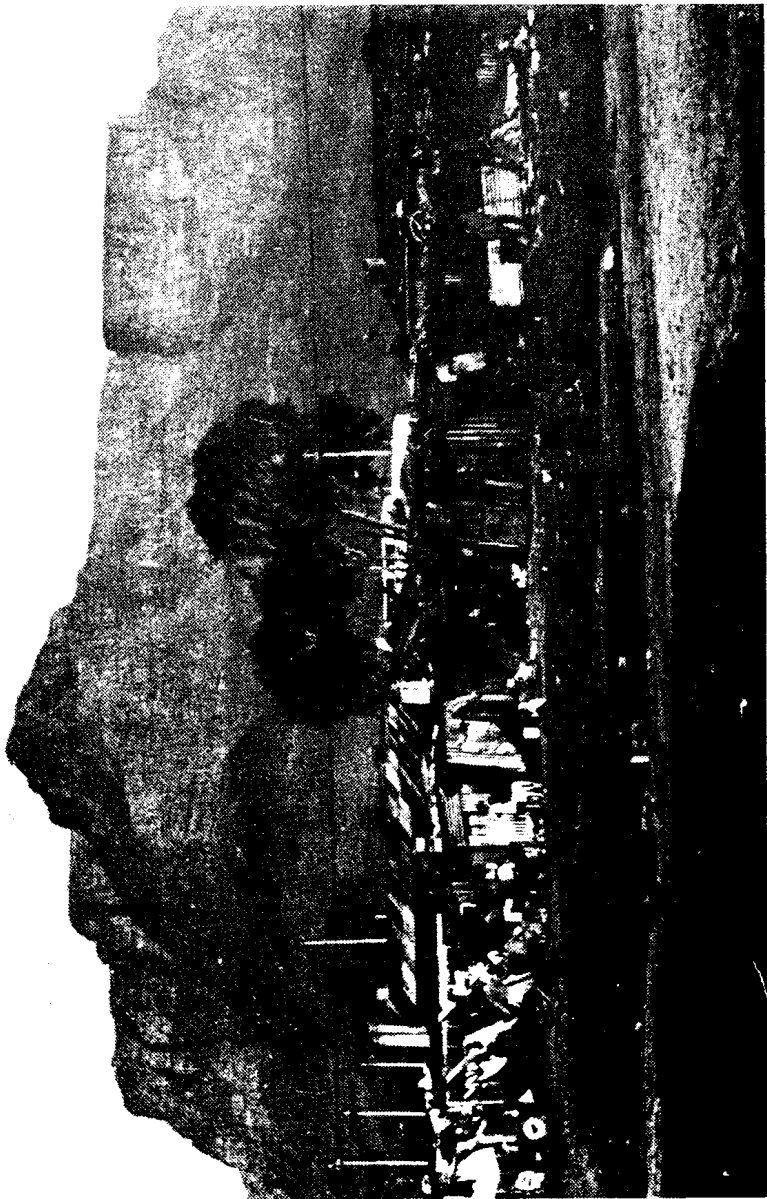
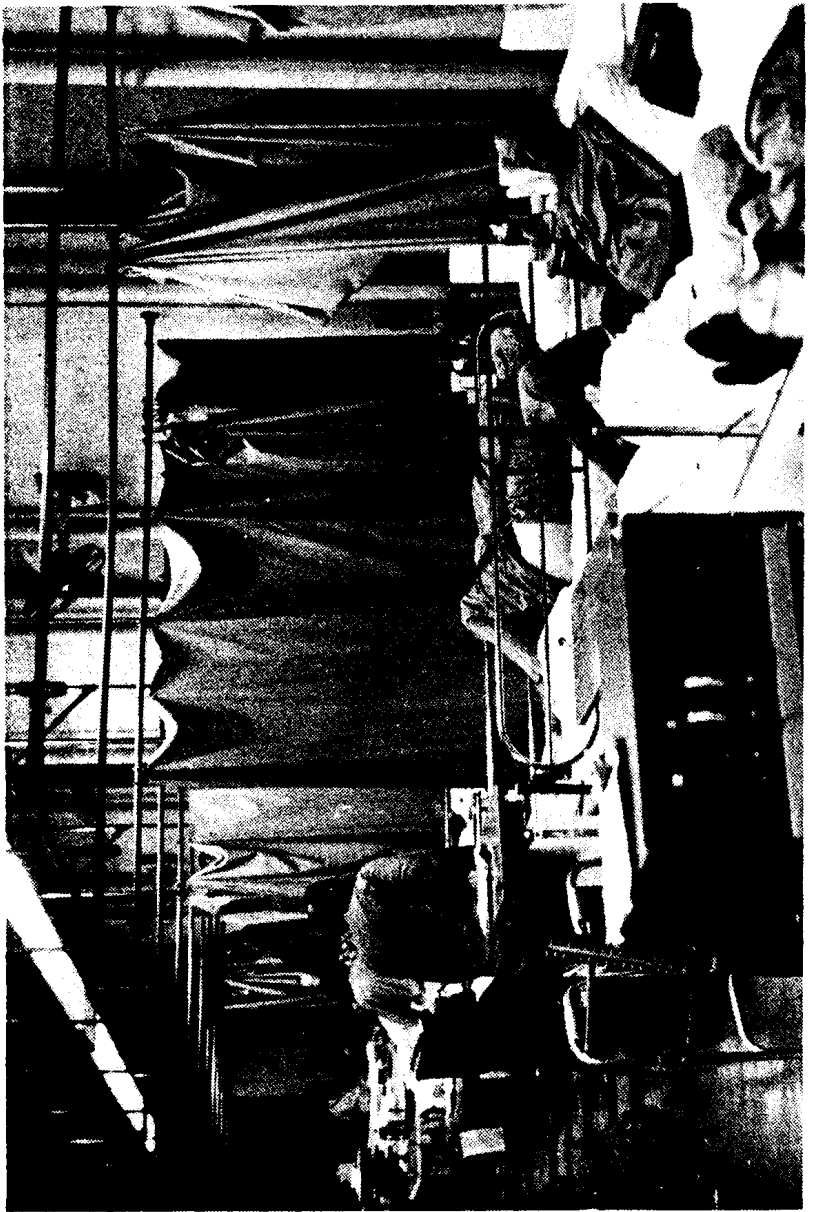
SEE STORY ON PAGE ONE.

CREDIT: Helen Winternitz/MOUNTAIN EAGLE/LNS

BOTTOM LEFT: The real cost of coal.

GOES WITH STORY ON PAGE ONE.

CREDIT: Danizer/MOUNTAIN EAGLE/LNS



TOP RIGHT: Lincoln Hospital, New York City.
The hospital serves the South Bronx, one
of the city's most depressed areas.

CAN GO WITH STORY ON PAGE 6.

CREDIT: MCHR/LNS

TOP LEFT: Boy in South African squatters'
camp.

GOES WITH STORY ON PAGE 5.

CREDIT: Southern Africa Committee/LNS

BOTTOM RIGHT: Crossroads and Muizenberg
areas of greater Capetown.

GOES WITH STORY ON PAGE 5.

CREDIT: Southern Africa Committee/LNS

BOTTOM LEFT: Crossroads and Muizenberg
areas of greater Capetown.

SEE STORY ON PAGE 5.

CREDIT: Southern Africa Committee/LNS